

Cost Effective Technological Intervention for Blending the Conventional and Distance Learning

Theme: Formal Education

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INTRODUCTION

The education system of India is one of the largest education systems in the world as it caters to the need of more than 1028 million people (as per 2001 Census). The Government of India has been focusing not only on spreading education but encouraging the people to be literate which forms the basis for universalization of education in the country. With the literacy rate of merely 18.3% in 1951, it has increased to 64.8% in 2001 and according to NSS 61st Round Survey Report No. 517, 2004-05, the literacy rate is 67.3% in 2004-05. According to the Census of India 2001, the male literacy rate was 75.26% while female literacy was 53.67% with literacy gap of 21.59%. The state of Kerala is having highest literacy rate in India with 94.24% for male and 87.72% for female with 6.52% literacy gap which happens to be the minimum in the country. On analyzing the decadal change in literacy rate from 1991, it is seen that it is 11.13% in male and 14.39% in female. During the last 10 years (1991-2001), the maximum change in literacy for males is 20.71% in the state of Rajasthan while 24.33% for females in the state of Chhattisgarh.

On further analysis of literacy rate on rural and urban perspective, India has 58.74% literacy in rural areas and 79.92 in urban areas. The state of Kerala once again has the highest literacy in rural areas which is 90.04% and 93.63% and 86.69% for male and female respectively. However in urban areas, it is the state of Mizoram which has the highest literacy rate of 96.13%. The study of literacy rate on the basis of specific social groups i.e. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) reveals that literacy rate in SC is 54.7% and 51.16% and 68.12% for rural and urban areas respectively. In the case of ST, it is 47.1% and for rural and urban areas, it is 45.02% and 69.09% respectively.

According to District Information System for Education (DISE) adult literacy rate in 2004 was 61%. The male adult literacy rate stands at 73% while for female it is 48%. However the youth literacy rate was 76% with male youth literacy rate as 84% and female as 68%.

The efforts of Government of India in this direction can also be appreciated by focusing on the expenditure made by the Government on this sector. In 1961, the total expenditure on education was Rs. 260.3 crores which was 11.7% of total expenditure on all other sectors and 1.52% of the GDP. In 2001-02, this stood at 3.84% of the GDP and it was 12.89% of total expenditure on all other sectors. If we look at the expenditure by level of education in India, then in 1991, the expenditure on elementary education was 1.78% of GDP and 1.24% of GDP for secondary and senior secondary education and 0.77% for higher education. As per the revised estimate of 2004-05, expenditure on elementary education is 6.57% (1.89% to GDP) to total expenditure on all sectors and 3.85% (1.11% to GDP) and 2.3% (0.66% to GDP) for secondary and senior secondary education and higher education respectively.

After having focused on the achievement so far in the context for literacy in population in India, the paper now explores the development in higher education.

Higher Education in India and Open and Distance Learning

The growth in educational network at the school level has been accompanied by similar growth at the higher education level in the country. With the gradual increase in population, greater awareness towards acquiring higher degrees and higher demand for qualified human resources both in the public as well as private sector, the Government of India has been endeavouring to widen the system so as to cover those regions which have been so far lacking in higher education facilities and provide better quality educational facilities of international standards. The highlights of the present setup have been given below:

Higher education institutions: 13985

College (G): 10377

College (P): 3201

Universities/Deemed to be Universities: 407

Teachers: 471931

Pupil-teacher Ratio: 25

Over the last 50 years, India has witnessed tremendous growth and development in the field of higher education, with a modest start of total 605 institutions of higher learning i.e. 370 colleges of general education, 208 colleges of professional education and 27 universities / deemed universities / institutions of national importance, it has reached to total number of 13985 institutions of higher learning in 2004-05 catering to over 11.7 million students. These institutions include 10377 colleges of general education, 3201 colleges of professional education and 407 universities/ deemed universities / institutions of national importance. These institutions together achieve a pupil-teacher ratio of 25 at the national level while have GPI of 0.71 for all the categories of population. However despite the overwhelming growth of higher educational institutions, the overall GER in the age group of 18-24 years stands at 9.97 at the national level. This shows that there is a greater need for more conventional mode of institutions or alternative mode of higher learning institutions or synergy of conventional and ODL mode of institutions so as to achieve the objective of universalization of higher education in India.

At the state level, the scenario of higher education shows that Maharashtra is the state leading over all other states in growth and development of higher education. Except for colleges of general education, which is highest in Andhra Pradesh (1340), Maharashtra tops the list in colleges of professional education (450), universities (42), number of teachers (57937), and total enrollment (1534613) with a pupil-teacher ratio of 26, slightly more than the national level i.e. 25. The highest pupil-teacher ratio is observed in Delhi while least being 9, is observed in four states/UTs. If we look at the GER, we find that it is far below as compared to that in primary and secondary education. It is 9.97 in higher education as compared to 107.8 and 39.91 in primary and secondary school education respectively. Delhi is the state having the highest GER of 37.25, followed by Chandigarh which is 37.01. The GER in SC and ST category stands at 6.72 and 4.86 respectively while Manipur (13.66) and UP (24.36) are having highest GER in SC and ST categories.

[illegible]

17	Meghalaya	3032	54								9	1	3	5	
18	Mizoram	3384	20												
19	Nagaland	1610	8												
20	Orissa	18645	102								394	5	46	6	2
21	Punjab	21073									1686	2	42	43	249
22	Rajasthan	13623	50	10124	1	33	6	52	2465	30	746	3	622	126	55
23	Sikkim	1755	7												
24	Tamil Nadu	21909	115	9361	1	24	0	252	875	20	194089	8	245	413	301
25	Tripura	1885	32								638	1	2	4	63
26	Uttar Pradesh	28451	88	22172	1	38	0	65	885	11	2465	3	30	51	25
27	Uttaranchal	6749	20	-	1						-	1	0	5	3
28	West Bengal	25409	89	4441	1	8	1	121	2473	4	14084	5	36	11	22
29	A&N Islands	1768	8												
30	Chandigarh		-								14146	1	6	22	74
31	D&N Haveli		-												
32	Daman & Diu		-												
33	Delhi	65624	117								39152	2	7	12	78
34	Lakshadweep		-												
35	Pondicherry		-								14212	1	-	31	3
	Miscellaneous	3311	60												

Source: Information base on distance higher education in India, DEC, IGNOU (2004). New Delhi, India, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.braou.ac.in>, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.baou.org>, IGNOU (2003). Regional Services Division Information base 2003. New Delhi, India, IGNOU (2005). IGNOU Profile 2007. New Delhi, India, IGNOU (2007). IGNOU Vice Chancellor's Report 2007. New Delhi, Karnataka State Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.ksoumysore.com> /, MP Bhoj Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.bhojvirtualuniversity.com> /, Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.ymou.com>, Netaji Subhash Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.wbnsou.com>, Tamil Nadu Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from, <http://www.indiavarta.com/education/tamilnaduopenuniversity/index.asp>, U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.uprtou.com>, Nalanda Open University. Retrieved on September 18, 2007 from <http://www.nalandaopenuniversity.com>.

The participation of girls in higher education stands at 39.41% of total enrollment in higher education, which is why the GPI at the national level is below 1 (0.71). Kerala is the state having the highest percent of girls in higher education i.e. 58.81 and the least being 19.97 in Orissa. This means that the girls are out numbering boys in higher education in Kerala. The percentage of girls in higher education in SC and ST categories is 37.21 and 36.27% respectively. The states of Jammu & Kashmir (16.13%) and Orissa (8.33) have the lowest percentage of girls in higher education in SC and ST categories respectively while highest percentage of girls in SC and ST categories is observed only in UTs which are Pondicherry (51.41%) and A & N Islands (57.43%). The GPI for all the categories is 0.71 and it stands at 0.64 and 0.55 in SC and ST categories respectively. It is very interesting to note that Kerala is the only state in India having GPI of more than 1 in all the three categories i.e. 1.22 in all, 1.41 in SC and 1.01 ST categories.

The existence of very low GER and less than 1 GPI in higher education in the country gives a valid reason for establishment, expansion and growth of alternative mode of providing higher education. Thus is the presence of a network of one national Open University (OU) and 13 state open universities and over hundred distance education institutions (DEIs) providing quality higher education through ODL mode. A composite profile of distance education network is summarized in the Table 1 above.

The network of OUs and DEIs as shown above in the Table 1 reflects gradual growth and development of higher education in ODL mode. One national OU i.e. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) with the mandate of disseminating higher education nationwide and 13 State Open Universities (SOUs) along with over 100 DEIs are catering to the need of the people for higher education. With the small enrollment of 4528 in 1987, the student strength of IGNOU has increased to 468444 in 2006-07 and it has cumulative student strength of over 1.4 million. Currently with 129 academic programmes and approximately 1100 courses on offer, it is extending provision of higher education through 64 regional / sub-regional centers and 1621 study centers (SCs). Approximately 25 thousand academic counsellors are engaged in providing their services to the students through SCs. Till March 2007, a total of 731765 students were awarded degrees/diplomas/certificates by IGNOU.

The efforts of the IGNOU have been also supplemented by the open universities existing at the state level. They together with 68 regional centers and 3607 SCs and 31472 academic counsellors

are providing access to higher education in their respective states. The SOU of the state of Madhya Pradesh, MPBOU, has the highest enrollment of 151353 while the SOU of Maharashtra, YCMOU, has the highest number of academic programmes on offer i.e. 78. On analyzing the contribution of DEIs which are located in the conventional universities / colleges, it is found that together with 1704 SCs, they are providing access to higher education in their respective states / areas of jurisdiction. The state of Tamil Nadu shows maximum enrollment through DEIs which is 194089.

Having discussed growth of higher education facilities and its availability to the vast population of India and the various parameters of education such as educational infrastructure, etc, we find that access and equity to education especially higher education is still a major goal to be achieved by India. The following section explores the various possible options / strategies that could be implemented in order to enhance the reach of education.

FUTURE STRATEGIES

Although significant progress has been made in India towards enhancing literacy in the country and universalization of basic education, but there still remains a lot to be accomplished in order to achieve the mission of 100% literacy along with increasing the enrollment of children in the schools and motivating them to complete the schooling, thus reducing the drop out ratio at various stages. Also what is needed is to generate awareness amongst the people especially in the rural and remote areas towards girl child education and in this process, women working in various social organizations can play an instrumental role in encouraging the mothers to send their girls to the schools. What is presently required is integration of conventional and ODL system so that both the systems can effectively share the resources and benefit from each other's expertise. The following suggestions are proposed as a part of creation of synergy of conventional and ODL Institutions towards achieving the objectives of Education for All.

- ❖ Share the facilities or infrastructure between conventional and ODL institutions at various locations where so far the concentration of schools is very low or where the setup does not exist.
- ❖ It should be mandatory for all the states and UTs to have State open schools with the primary responsibility of providing basic education.
- ❖ District level schools should act as the nodal body for coordinating between the educational centers at villages and the headquarters of the state open schools and they should be vested with the responsibility of monitoring the progress of these educational centers located at rural areas.
- ❖ Provision of mobile schooling for remote areas.
- ❖ ODL system has to be used for literacy mission and increase in the enrollment at the primary level and accordingly, state level primary ODL schools could be setup in the pattern of state open schools which would have the prime responsibility of enhancing literacy and providing basic school education. Similarly, state open schools should also be vested with the responsibility of providing elementary education and spreading literacy.
- ❖ Services of retired teachers can be taken in the rural areas where there is shortage of teaching staff, thus reducing the pupil-teacher ratio. Also region specific qualified and trained but unemployed youth could be involved in these schools as they would be aware of the local problems and issues besides having knowledge of the local language so would be able to teach better the children of those remote areas.
- ❖ By improving working conditions of teachers and giving them suitable compensation, the teachers can be encouraged to take up positions in rural and remote areas. This could include providing good quality housing facilities, supplementary pay and allowances for being posted in rural and remote areas, better promotion prospects and development opportunities for these teachers.
- ❖ Public-private partnership should be encouraged by involving more number of private schools in the national literacy mission.
- ❖ Gender sensitization towards school education of girl child needs to be taken up.
- ❖ Encourage business houses to adopt sub-divisions/village level schools for infrastructure maintenance and provision of better facilities and this could be termed as School adoption programme as a part of fulfilment of their social responsibility.
- ❖ Involvement of the leading and reputed private school campus which are located at the rural areas to have ODL centers for people to get their children admitted for school education.
- ❖ Greater dependence on audiovisual aids for teaching purpose so as to encourage learning by doing and supplement face-to-face with audio-visual teaching.
- ❖ Promote investment in schools and primary learning centers by giving tax rebates or exemptions on such investments.

- ❖ Setting up of evening schools in the presently existing infrastructure which could be managed or given on contractual basis to the private organizations or semi-government or non-government organizations for managing them.

All these measures if implemented properly, could direct towards enhancing literacy, increasing GER, reducing gender disparity and decreasing dropout rate. Efforts should be aimed at bringing education and schools at the doorstep of the children rather pushing them to schools. No doubt, if efforts are taken with sincerity, commitment and zeal for success, this mission although is difficult but not impossible to achieve, for a country like India.

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